



How law enforcement climbed the ladder of a massive drug ring

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If you ask Kentucky State Police detective Randy Hunter why tens of thousands of methadone pills flooded Floyd County's streets seven years ago, he'll point to a billboard advertisement in Louisiana.

According to Hunter, in 2004, Rusty Meade, a truck driver from Floyd County, frequently traveled through Louisiana and saw a billboard advertising pain treatment at Urgent Care Services.

For Kentucky, this ad changed the landscape of the state's prescription drug epidemic; an epidemic that now takes more lives than car wrecks.

Long before the largest drug sweep in Kentucky's history (518 people arrested for prescription drugs), and before pill mills outnumbered McDonald's restaurants in some Florida counties, there were Urgent Care pain clinics in Louisiana, Philadelphia and Cincinnati. These pain clinics supplied pills to hoards of frustrated prescription drug addicts from Kentucky whose efforts to illegally obtain prescription narcotics were met by a stiff law enforcement response led by Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting.

In the early part of the decade, Roger West, a federal prosecutor with the U.S. Attorney's Office worked cases targeting unscrupulous Kentucky doctors using unlawful prescribing practices.

"We took out the worst of the worst and the prosecutions of these doctors were well publicized," West said. "Those types of cases and KASPER made it very difficult to doctor shop in Kentucky."

But West and many law enforcement officials weren't expecting what came next.

"People in Floyd County were passing out in their cars and restaurants from all the methadone they were taking," West said.

Forty milligram methadone wafers started popping up everywhere in Floyd County.

"We had seen methadone before in small doses, but not the high level 40-milligram wafers," West said.

West, Hunter and FBI agent Donnie Kidd, along with local law enforcement in Floyd County interviewed numerous drug traffickers. In addition to the interviews, the law enforcement group also received information from authorities in Pennsylvania that Floyd County residents were frequenting the area to obtain pills. Law enforcement learned that a Philadelphia doctor was prescribing excessive amounts of methadone wafers to eastern Kentuckians.

Sometime in 2005, FBI and KSP investigators arrested a man named Larry Goble, who was paying several other Floyd County residents to travel to Urgent Care in Philadelphia and obtain hundreds of prescription pills. The typical prescription consisted of 120 Xanax, 120 Percocet and 160 Methadone. Hunter estimated these pills had a street value of approximately \$5,000. >>